

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 11073

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR JA US OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)
SUBJECT: BRIEFING BOOK FOR SECRETARY'S VISIT: JAPANESE VIEWS ON
KOREAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL

1. THE JAPANESE ARE GENERALLY CONFIDENT THAT, DESPITE
WITHDRAWAL OF GROUND TROOPS, THE US WILL MAINTAIN ITS DEFENSE
COMMITMENT TO THE ROK AND WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY A STABILIZING
ROLE IN ASIA. NEVERTHELESS, THEY REMAIN APPREHENSIVE THAT
THE SITUATION ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA IS ENTERING A NEW, MORE
FLUID STAGE AND FEEL GREATER UNCERTAINTY AS TO US INTENTIONS
AND ACTIONS IN THIS AREA.
2. THE GOJ'S INITIALLY NEGATIVE REACTION LAST FALL TO THE
PROPOSED WITHDRAWAL OF US TROOPS FROM THE ROK HAS SINCE SHIFTED
TO GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE US DECISION. IN PM FUKUDA'S
MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN MARCH AND IN SUBSEQUENT
CONSULTATIONS WITH JCS CHAIRMAN BROWN AND UNDER SECRETARY
HABIB IN TOKYO THIS MAY, THE JAPANESE HAVE EMPHASIZED THE
IMPORTANCE THEY ATTACH TO CONTINUED STABILITY ON THE KOREAN
PENINSULA, AND HAVE WELCOMED US ASSURANCES THAT THE
WITHDRAWAL WOULD NOT BE OONDUCTED IN A DESTABLIZING MANNER.
3. CENTRAL TO THE GOJ'S PERCEPTION OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL
IS ITS ASSESSMENT THAT THE US COMMITMENT TO DEFEND THE
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ROK IS "INDISPENSABLE" TO THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF
JAPAN. THE POTENTIAL DIVISIVENESS OF KOREAN AND
SECURITY-RELATED ISSUES WITHIN JAPANESE DOMESTIC
POLITICS, HOWEVER, PREVENTS THE GOJ FROM PUBLICLY
ARTICULATING THIS VIEW. CONSEQUENTLY, THE GOJ FACES A
DILEMMA OF ATTEMPTING TO SIGNAL ITS CONCERNS TO THE
USG WITHOUT ASSUMING A POLITICALLY UNTENABLE PUBLIC

ROLE OF DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN KOREAN SECURITY MATTERS.

4. AS IT HAS BECOME APPARENT THAT THE US DECISION WAS FINAL AND THAT WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE GRADUAL AND LIMITED TO GROUND FORCES, TROOP WITHDRAWAL HAS BEEN DEFUSED AS AN IMMEDIATE POLITICAL ISSUE AFFECTING US-JAPAN RELATIONS. ALTHOUGH SPECIFIC INCIDENTS, SUCH AS THE NORTH KOREAN DOWNING OF A US HELICOPTER, HAVE PERIODICALLY GENERATED FLURRIES OF MEDIA EXCITEMENT, IN GENERAL POPULAR ATTENTION TO THE WITHDRAWAL ISSUE HAS DIMINISHED MARKEDLY.

5. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, PERSISTENT SIGNS OF JAPANESE UNCERTAINTY AND UNEASINESS, LESS WITH THE MILITARY SPECIFICS OF WITHDRAWAL THAN WITH ITS LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS AND THE MANNER IN WHICH THE US DECISION HAS BEEN HANDLED:

-- DESPITE VARIOUS HIGH-LEVEL USG PRESENTATIONS OF THE RATIONALE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL, MANY JAPANESE CONTINUE TO SUSPECT THAT THE MOTIVATING FORCE BEHIND WITHDRAWAL HAS BEEN A NEED TO FULFILL THE PRESIDENT'S CAMPAIGN COMMITMENT. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THE US DECISION HAS BEEN PART OF A CAREFULLY-CONSIDERED POLICY FOR THE ASIAN REGION, BASED ON STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS.

-- THE JAPANESE HAVE HOPED THAT US WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY A PLAN FOR CONCERTED DIPLOMATIC
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ACTION TO BRING ABOUT A LONG-TERM REDUCTION OF TENSIONS ON THE PENINSULA. THEY PARTICULARLY QUESTION THE VALUE OF WASHINGTON'S EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT OF WITHDRAWAL AS A FIXED POLICY WITHIN A SET TIME-FRAME BEFORE ANY ATTEMPT TO GAIN CONCESSIONS FROM PYONGYANG. (AT THE SAME TIME, THEY WORRY THAT THE USG MAY BE CONSIDERING BEHIND-THE-SCENES DIPLOMATIC CONTACT WITH PYONGYANG WITHOUT INFORMING THE GOJ.)

-- THE JAPANESE ARE NOT YET FULLY CONVINCED THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF US GROUND FORCES WOULD NOT ALTER THE MILITARY BALANCE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA. THEY FEAR THAT MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE ROK MILITARY MIGHT SPUR A NEW ARMS RACE ON THE PENINSULA. CONVERSELY, THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT A FIXED WITHDRAWAL SCHEDULE MIGHT NOT BE SUFFICIENTLY FLEXIBLE SHOULD THE US CONGRESS FAIL TO SUPPORT COMPENSATORY ASSISTANCE TO THE ROK MILITARY.
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